

He's a Sucker for the Balance of Power

Sen. Gale McGee's Foreign Policy Puts Him Outspokenly Behind LBJ

5/8/66
By Bryce Nelson

Washington Post Staff Writer

SEN. GALE MCGEE delivers his foreign policy views with a slam of his fist.

"It's still the law of the jungle," he says of international relations, pounding his desk. "It's still international anarchy. We talk change, but the bigger the issue, the lower we go for rules—into the jungle."

The newest member of the Foreign Relations Committee is one of the few Senators giving whole-hearted, outspoken support to the President's policy in Vietnam. The Wyoming Democrat's committee colleagues have already taken note how he follows the administration right down the line on this issue.

After McGee asked his first questions of Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the Foreign Relations Committee hearing April 18, Sen. Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.) gave him a good-natured rap on the knuckles. Case asked Rusk to clarify his answers, explaining that "I am not as good as the Senator from Wyoming at putting them over the plate for you to sock out of the park."

A Head Start

IT IS HARDLY surprising that McGee should support the Administration on Vietnam—and on most other issues. Like most Democrats who entered the Senate in the late 1950s, he owes much to his onetime Senate Majority Leader, Lyndon B. Johnson. In fact, he owes more than most of them.

During McGee's initial race for the Senate in 1958, Mr. Johnson went to Wyoming and promised the voters that McGee would have a coveted seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee if they elected him. Although places on that committee had not previously been allocated to Senate freshmen, Mr. Johnson came through on his promise.

McGee did not fully reciprocate the favor. At the 1960 Democratic convention, he voted for John F. Kennedy. It was not a real rift, however, and McGee's ties with the White House have been strengthened in the past year by his support of the President's Vietnam policy.

His foreign policy might be summed up in the sentence, "America must

maintain the balance of power." He is aware that many view this theory as "cruel" and "inhumane," but he sees the preservation of the world balance of power as the only alternative to war.

"Maybe it's wrong, maybe it's immoral, maybe it's ruthless," he argues, "but that's irrelevant. We have to start where we are."

In McGee's mind, where we are in 1966 is the same world he described

in an article for the American Scholar quarterly in 1950: "a jungle world of sovereign nations and international anarchy." In the jungle world of 1966, McGee believes, the United States is fighting in South Vietnam for one reason: to preserve the world balance of power by denying the wealth of Southeast Asia to the Chinese.

"The Vietnamese are incidental to the balance of Asia," he explains, "but Southeast Asia, with its 300 million people, its tin, rice and bauxite, is a considerable resource, a major power calculation."

While supporting Administration policy in Vietnam, McGee contemptuously dismisses many of the reasons given by the Administration for our involvement there.

"It's a mistake for them to use SEATO as a justification and let Sen. Morse drag them down in the bushes by the side of the road," he says.

He also challenges the thesis that the United States is fighting to make South Vietnam safe for democratic government. McGee thinks democracy too sophisticated a governmental form for Vietnam.

In order to deny Southeast Asia to the Chinese, he is willing to risk going to the mat with Communist China itself.

"Whenever you're in a crucial area for the balance of power," he argues, "you have to be willing to take the ultimate risk. You can't let the fear

of war with China obsess us."

A Strategic Change

AFTER PRESIDENT JOHNSON ordered the bombing of North Vietnam in February, 1965, McGee made a Senate speech urging the bombing of North Vietnam's industrial centers if the Vietcong kept up its aggression. But now, he does not believe there is any reasonable justification for bombing North Vietnamese cities.

Early in April, McGee accompanied Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance on a ten-day trip to Vietnam. He came back very concerned that there were not enough South Vietnamese engaged in civilian reconstruction.

Greater use of South Vietnamese manpower in civilian activities, he admits, "raises the dirty political issue of using more American troops in combat." He is quite willing, however, to contemplate the extensive use of American troops as the necessary price for preserving the all-important balance of power.

"I was a natural sucker for the balance of power," McGee says. "I was a victim of history—a history teacher."

As a Ph.D. candidate in American history at the University of Chicago, McGee wrote his doctoral thesis to

prove that the American Founding Fathers were "militant balance of power boys" who played off one European power against another.

The examining committee disputed the validity of his thesis but was finally won over by the arguments of Prof. Hans Morgenthau. Morgenthau, ironically, is now one of the leading critics of the Administration's Vietnam policy.

A 1936 graduate of the State Teachers College at Wayne in his native Nebraska, McGee had spent nine years teaching in high schools and colleges while attending graduate school summer after summer. Then he borrowed enough money for a year of study that gave him his doctorate in 1947 at the age of 32.

Meanwhile, he had joined the faculty of the University of Wyoming at Laramie. An energetic speaker, he soon attracted a following not only at the university but in the many Wyoming towns where he lectured. He says that he has a built-in political base of 4000 former students scattered around the state. "And I never flunked one of them," he adds with a grin.

His political apprenticeship also included a year's leave of absence in 1955 to be legislative assistant to Wyoming's popular Sen. Joseph C. O'Mahoney (D). The following year, he led one of the first tourist groups into the Soviet Union and increased his visibility in Wyoming by writing a widely circulated newspaper column describing the trip. He also delivered a "Religion in Russia" address from many Wyoming church pulpits.

In his 1958 Senate race, McGee won a narrow upset victory over the veteran Republican Sen. Frank Barrett, whom McGee terms a "deeply committed isolationist." Barrett's supporters claimed that McGee knew more about the rest of the world than he did about Wyoming. McGee says this charge helped him because the Soviet launching of Sputnik had awakened a greater international awareness in Wyoming.

A Bow to Oilmen

McGEE HAS MADE some concessions to his conservative constituency. He has consistently supported the 27½ per cent oil depletion allowance, which he defends on the ground that it is necessary to encourage the deep drilling required to discover oil in Wyoming.

On the other hand, McGee has voted for almost all of the liberal legislation proposed by the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, including the wilderness and wild rivers bills, which are controversial in his state.

As the most junior committee member, McGee will probably try to restrain his tongue for a time, but his deeply held foreign policy views

will eventually force him to clash with such members as Chairman J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), who opposes the Administration's intervention in what he terms a Vietnamese civil war.

As one might expect, McGee has great respect for intellectuals and



By Ken Fell, Staff Photographer

Sen. Gale McGee, Wyoming's new addition to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . . . His foreign policy might be summed up in the sentence, "America must maintain the balance of power."

professors and it bothers him that so many of them disagree with him on Vietnam.

"I'm a great admirer of Walter Lippmann and Bill Fulbright," he says. "You have to be a real believer in Administration policy on Vietnam

to disagree with Lippmann and Fulbright."

"Suppose you are wrong, McGee, I ask myself every night," he admits.

But McGee's nocturnal doubts seem to disappear in the heat of daytime oratory.